

## Beowulf

### XXII

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**BEOWULF** spake, bairn of Ecgtheow:--  
"Have mind, thou honored offspring of Healfdene  
gold-friend of men, now I go on this quest,  
sovrän wise, what once was said:  
if in thy cause it came that I  
should lose my life, thou wouldst loyal bide  
to me, though fallen, in father's place!  
Be guardian, thou, to this group of my thanes,  
my warrior-friends, if War should seize me;  
and the goodly gifts thou gavest me,  
Hrothgar beloved, to Hygelac send!  
Geatland's king may ken by the gold,  
Hrethel's son see, when he stares at the treasure,  
that I got me a friend for goodness famed,  
and joyed while I could in my jewel-bestower.  
And let Unferth wield this wondrous sword,  
earl far-honored, this heirloom precious,  
hard of edge: with Hrunting I  
seek doom of glory, or Death shall take me."

After these words the Weder-Geat lord  
boldly hastened, biding never  
answer at all: the ocean floods  
closed o'er the hero. Long while of the day  
fled ere he felt the floor of the sea.  
Soon found the fiend who the flood-domain  
sword-hungry held these hundred winters,  
greedy and grim, that some guest from above,  
some man, was raiding her monster-realm.  
She grasped out for him with grisly claws,  
and the warrior seized; yet scathed she not  
his body hale; the breastplate hindered,  
as she strove to shatter the sark of war,  
the linked harness, with loathsome hand.  
Then bore this brine-wolf, when bottom she touched,  
the lord of rings to the lair she haunted  
whiles vainly he strove, though his valor held,  
weapon to wield against wondrous monsters  
that sore beset him; sea-beasts many  
tried with fierce tusks to tear his mail,  
and swarmed on the stranger. But soon he marked  
he was now in some hall, he knew not which,  
where water never could work him harm,

nor through the roof could reach him ever  
fangs of the flood. Firelight he saw,  
beams of a blaze that brightly shone.  
Then the warrior was ware of that wolf-of-the-deep,  
mere-wife monstrous. For mighty stroke  
he swung his blade, and the blow withheld not.  
Then sang on her head that seemly blade  
its war-song wild. But the warrior found  
the light-of-battle [footnote 1] was loath to bite,  
to harm the heart: its hard edge failed  
the noble at need, yet had known of old  
strife hand to hand, and had helmets cloven,  
doomed men's fighting-gear. First time, this,  
for the gleaming blade that its glory fell.

Firm still stood, nor failed in valor,  
heedful of high deeds, Hygelac's kinsman;  
flung away fretted sword, featly jewelled,  
the angry earl; on earth it lay  
steel-edged and stiff. His strength he trusted,  
hand-gripe of might. So man shall do  
whenever in war he weens to earn him  
lasting fame, nor fears for his life!  
Seized then by shoulder, shrank not from combat,  
the Geatish war-prince Grendel's mother.  
Flung then the fierce one, filled with wrath,  
his deadly foe, that she fell to ground.  
Swift on her part she paid him back  
with grisly grasp, and grappled with him.  
Spent with struggle, stumbled the warrior,  
fiercest of fighting-men, fell adown.  
On the hall-guest she hurled herself, hent her short sword,  
broad and brown-edged, [footnote 2] the bairn to avenge,  
the sole-born son. -- On his shoulder lay  
braided breast-mail, barring death,  
withstanding entrance of edge or blade.  
Life would have ended for Ecgtheow's son,  
under wide earth for that earl of Geats,  
had his armor of war not aided him,  
battle-net hard, and holy God  
wielded the victory, wisest Maker.  
The Lord of Heaven allowed his cause;  
and easily rose the earl erect.

#### Footnotes.

##### 1.

Kenning for "sword." Hrunting is bewitched, laid under a spell of uselessness, along with

all other swords.

**2.**

This brown of swords, evidently meaning burnished, bright, continues to be a favorite adjective in the popular ballads.